

Research in Baptist History in Eastern Europe: Why?

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[229] In recent years Baptists in Eastern Europe have become increasingly involved in re-interpreting their history. A number of studies, including master and doctoral dissertations, have been written. Though local seminaries in Russia, Ukraine and other countries have had a key role to play here, the wider audience has benefited extensively from the work done by the International Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS) in Prague. The Department of Baptist and Anabaptist Studies of IBTS, as well as other departments, have systematically encouraged Eastern European students to explore their local stories, their tradition and theology, and publish the results in the modern *lingua franca* - the English language. This has resulted in a number of interesting research works. These works have been based on Russian, Bulgarian, Moldovan, Polish and other primary material, and have now been made available for an English speaking world.¹

By no means should one underestimate the research in Eastern European Baptist history conducted in other research centers.² However, the IBTS has made a rather unique, deliberate and systematic effort to bring Eastern European local stories of Baptists into the awareness of scholars and students internationally. The research is usually carried [230] out by a student or students in their home countries, involving careful work with primary sources in archives, some of which were opened up only after political and religious pressures relaxed in the 1990s. International Baptist Theological Seminary offers academic supervision and rich library resources as well as a forum for interaction with other researchers who work with a goal of making the Eastern European Baptist story better known and interpreted.

However, the answer to the question, “Why do Eastern European Baptists need to research their history?” is not self-evident. At times it is easier to avoid dealing with the past, especially when the past contains atheistic pressures, dramatic experiences in personal and church life, and painful ethical compromises. Why tear old wounds apart? Would it not be better just to forget some “previous chapters” and move ahead? Nevertheless, after some consideration one would probably agree with Miroslav Volf’s position mirrored all through his book *The End of Memory*: the whole issue of remembering truthfully and forgetting rightly is a more complex one than meets the eye.³

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There is one more popular argument that expresses doubt in the importance of history. Why dig in past events when in a changing world there are new challenges which are much more urgent and acute? Fulfilling a church's vision, developing a new generation of leaders, helping disciples to grow, polishing mission-strategies and planting new churches – all this seems to have nothing or very little to do with history. Daniel H. Williams has pointed out a weakness in modern evangelical movements, which is true also of Baptists. Shallow pragmatics and management skills too often have replaced church's corporate memory and theological reflection as guiding forces for development. "While pastors have become more efficient administrators and keepers of the institution, along with being excellent performers, they are losing their ability to act as able interpreters of their historic faith."⁴ This general tendency characterises not only Western, but also to a considerable degree Eastern European evangelicals. So, the question remains, "Why do Eastern European Baptists need to research their history?"

This article argues that there are at least four reasons why Baptists in Eastern Europe need to develop a thorough, balanced and relevant reflection upon their history: history is a part of a movement's identity-development; historiography dealing with the Baptist story in a Communist context is an exercise of reconciliation; continuous dialogue with the past deepens Christian spirituality; church history written from and about a minority's ecclesial position contributes to a more holistic and comprehensive historiography. [231]

EASTERN EUROPEAN BAPTIST HISTORY WRITING AS A PART OF IDENTITY-DEVELOPMENT

Paul Fiddes, a British Baptist scholar, has said that Baptist identity, though involving a universal dimension and present reality, also includes an aspect of locality and specific past. "This 'local' form might be a national union, or it might even be the associational life of churches within a region of a union; in its particularity it will have an identity that comes from its own history and heritage of thought as well as its activities today."⁵ For a religious body, it is crucially important to be aware of its path in the past. Without a healthy relation with and reflection upon its past experience, a religious community is less prepared to face its present and future challenges. A tree needs deep roots in order to blossom and bear fruit. Baptists often do not consider their tradition as a theological category; this state of affairs can be described "not as an absence of tradition, but a lack of reflection on it."⁶

This is true also in Eastern Europe, in the region of former Soviet bloc countries. During Soviet times the possibilities for Baptists to analyse their historical development were limited. Theological education in a formal and systematic sense of the word was practically lacking in the region.⁷ Also, church leaders and scarce Baptist scholars were busy with what seemed to be more urgent issues: keeping unity in churches, offering basic (often handwritten or typed) Bible study materials, preparing new pastoral leaders for ministry by using unofficial methods such as informal training and mentoring. History seemed to be less important, as the future was at risk. At best, historical narrative served a sermonic and spiritually edifying role, or helped Baptist leaders to prove to state authorities that this ecclesial body can be trusted. It was assumed that “old age” and “things with history” deserve respect. However, this functional use of history was far from an analytical and systematic exploration.

Sometimes dealing with history was dangerous. Some historical data could be used by government officials against church members and leaders, accusing them of disloyalty or putting them under pressure. Often it was easier and safer to forget about history. “The less you remember, the better,” was advice that aimed at keeping ethical integrity when a perspective of being interrogated by KGB or other secret services was a part of a believer’s everyday life.⁸ Soviet officials were eager to collect information. This resulted in the fact, ironically, that Communist officials were sometimes more interested in preserving Baptist historical documents, such as minute books and memoirs, while Baptists themselves considered the documentary evidence “explosive.” For example, being afraid that their materials could be used against their church members, the leaders of Tallinn Evangelical Christian [232] Church Karmel burned their church archive in the 1940s. They consoled themselves with the view that “God knows every name and everybody’s activities.”⁹ Similar stories could be found in other Eastern European countries. Needless to say, this considerably weakened Baptist identity.

Even if Baptists in Eastern Europe sometimes still live with Communist shadows, as the patterns of preserving and understanding their history were broken or did not have a chance fully to develop, it is becoming increasingly clear that their identity requires interpretation of the past and how all this plays a part in a religious movement’s self-understanding. As crucially important materials regarding Baptist history exist in state archives in Eastern Europe, researchers have started to analyse these materials with critical tools. But Baptists should not rely on these materials exclusively. Equally important is gathering materials from their own sources: collecting written memoirs and oral history,

locating documents in home archives, putting church archives in order. Sharyl Corrado emphasises that “such opportunities leave historians, guardians of the collective memory of generations past, with a deep responsibility before God and the communities of faith.”¹⁰ New knowledge and awareness of their history offers Eastern European Baptists a chance to deepen their self-understanding and sharpen their sense of mission.

Usually, organisations that have established their position in society become more concerned about rendering their history to a wider audience. However, this is not only a matter of public relations or increasing respect towards a “well established organisation.” Relevant work in Baptist history is primarily necessary for Baptists themselves, for their sense of community and belonging. Historical narrative helps to transmit the integral patterns of practice and convictions from a generation to generation. It presumably helps to learn from some earlier mistakes and to relate to a present day believer with a wider story, and to assist in comprehending one’s strengths and challenges as a community of believers. All this is very much needed in Eastern Europe, as there were years of Communist restrictions when research in church history and theological reflection was severely hindered.

This is not to say that what matters is only academically rigorous research. The historical narrative on a grassroots level, on the level of so called primary theology or ordinary theology, the “theologizing of Christians who have received little or no theological education of a scholarly, academic or systematic kind,”¹¹ should not be underestimated. Practices, songs and stories rendered in family circles, Sunday school classes and among local church members, often without secondary analytical reflection, play an important role in shaping communal identity. However, this article is convinced that more goal-orientated and systematic work in this field is needed. This is especially important [233] when a religious movement reaches a phase of “identity confusion,” which happened in Eastern European Baptist life in the 1990s when the Communist system collapsed, new liberties dawned and the whole religious landscape was suddenly an arena of diverse missionary groups and theological influences. This situation partly continues; we can still talk about post-Communist contexts. In order to make informed decisions and set new goals which, nevertheless, are consistent with the movement’s past, analytical awareness of history is crucially important.

The dynamics of history and identity also shed light on Baptist ecumenical relations, and learning from other traditions, lest ecumenism be viewed only as ecclesiastical political manoeuvring. Baptists have not lived and been formed in a vacuum; in Eastern Europe they have sometimes conformed, sometimes conversed and sometimes confronted with other Christian traditions: Catholics and Orthodox, Lutherans and Moravians, Mennonites,

Nazarenes and Reformed. Theologian Miroslav Volf has stated: “In order to keep our allegiance to Jesus Christ pure, we need to nurture commitment to the multicultural community of Christian churches. We need to see ourselves and our own understanding of God’s future with the eyes of Christians from other churches...” These other believers help us to “make sure that the voice of our culture has not drowned out the voice of Jesus Christ.”¹² Paraphrasing Volf, one could say that we need to see our past not only with our own eyes but also with the eyes of other Christians. We also need the voices of others to assess whether in our own framework of historical identity we have remained faithful to the voice of Jesus Christ.

In addition, the study of local or regional Baptist history can serve as a basis for cooperation with other types of Baptists, with those living outside the Eastern European geographical region. It is difficult to learn thoroughly one’s own story without using a method of comparison. Though it may sound paradoxical, explorative interest in Eastern European Baptist history opens windows for learning more about American, Asian, British, Scandinavian, German, and possibly other Baptist and baptistic stories. There are direct and indirect links between different “tribes of Baptists.” There are areas of overlap, mutually borrowed practices, even universal baptistic characteristics, but most probably the process of comparison also reveals cases when different Baptist identities have created tensions when meeting with each other. However, comparison is a process of not only finding one’s already-existing identity, but also that of willing identification.¹³ Eastern European Baptists need not and must not remain self-sufficient, but must embrace and enhance a wider experience. Having lived in relative isolation from the wider Baptist family during Soviet years, they may perceive this learning [234] experience of “meeting the other” as a challenge that requires new skills to integrate aspects of identity, history and theology.

EASTERN EUROPEAN BAPTIST HISTORY WRITING AS AN EXERCISE OF RECONCILIATION

Besides being an exercise in identity-strengthening, the study of Eastern European Baptist history is also an exercise in repentance and reconciliation. Partly this exercise is still waiting to be carried out. According to the present author’s knowledge, no major research has been done in such sensitive areas as the Soviet Baptists’ cooperation with the KGB; nationalist tendencies and Eastern European evangelicals; Communist and/or Slavophil ideology and Baptist believers; Baptist convictions and ethnic conflicts. Even the major chapter of the painful relationships between officially recognized and underground Baptists in the former

Soviet Union remains largely unexplored, though general facts are known through a number of volumes. This list of topics that still await further research is not exhaustive.

One set of research questions, related to recent Baptist history in Eastern Europe, is linked to the persecution and surveillance of believers. It must also be noted that compromises during Communism undermined believers' churches' faithfulness to the Gospel as well as their integrity. It would be an oversimplification to depict official Baptist churches in Communist lands as traitors of pure faith and underground churches as heroic martyrs who kept their faith intact, free of atheistic mud and filth. The picture was more colourful and it was not easy to choose between "discretion and valour," to use the phrase coined by Trevor Beeson.¹⁴ What I want to argue is: the challenge for Eastern European Baptist historiography is not to avoid, but to deal honestly with these painful issues, among which at least two could be pointed out; firstly, Baptist resistance, collaboration and compromises with the atheistic state; secondly, a Baptist tendency to demonize ideological opponents – atheists or *traditores* or underground troublemakers – instead of loving them, as was Jesus' command. In addition, being persecuted was often not an imposed but chosen identity. The pattern of the first centuries repeated itself.¹⁵

If the story of Eastern European Baptists, including faithfulness and betrayals under atheistic pressures, remains without analytical attention, it would be open to speculations, prejudices and ungrounded legends. And what is even more serious, without re-telling this part of the story and without finding reconciliation, the collective identity of Eastern European Baptists would be weakened by the lack of sorrow and mourning, which psychologically would open a way for going [235] forward. This sadness is not only sadness of mistakes and sins made by believers themselves, it is also sadness of injustice and suffering inflicted on believers. Some years ago, I stated – addressing my words first and foremost to Eastern European Baptists – that the complex story of persecution needs to be analysed and remembered both with thankfulness and repentance. Otherwise we will be trapped in our past.¹⁶

Until today, in Eastern European Baptist historiography, we are lacking academically thoroughgoing and well-reasoned analysis of Baptists and secret service relationships which would be quality-wise similar to what Andrea Strübind has written on the multifaceted relationships of the German Baptists and Nazi German authorities. More recently, Bernard Green has written a volume which offers a European-wide summary of Baptist reactions to National Socialism.¹⁷ The narrative from a Communist context, dealing with Baptist relationships with Communist ideology, will certainly be different, with its own developments

and turning points, yielding and resistance, but it would be unfortunate if Eastern European Baptists would leave blank this part of their history.

Miroslav Volf has argued that remembering can be a part of redemption and reconciliation, a remedy against hatred. However, it can also be a form of vengeance.¹⁸ The latter should be avoided. Even if Volf focuses more on personal wounds and experiences of injustice, and deals with his material from a more strictly theological perspective, his approach is fruitful also for a Christian historian. It is important not to forget the ethical aspect of history writing: dealing with painful aspects of history is a part of church's process of being an agent of reconciliation. How "memory of wrongdoing" should operate if neither personally nor communally believers desire "neither to hate nor to disregard but to love the wrongdoer"?¹⁹ Reconciliation requires open and honest engagement with one's own story. A historian here is a helper who using sources she has will make as justified and honest conclusions as possible, however, being aware of her limits, deliberately refusing to take the role of a "divine judge."

But there is one more facet to this complex issue. Eastern European Baptists, in the light of history-writing, are encouraged to strive to understand better the relationships between legal and illegal evangelical churches during the Soviet years. Illegal or underground churches played the role of protestors and martyrs, while official churches were accused by the "faithful remnant" of making allegedly unethical compromises.²⁰ This chapter of the 1960s and 1970s in Slavic Baptist history has left deep wounds and caused fragmentation that has not been fully overcome even today. Baptist historiography written with scholarly truthfulness and empathy can potentially help to enhance healing, and help believers' communities as well as individual Christians [236] "to live with the past without its wounds being kept open by the blade of memory."²¹ Paradoxical as it may sound, truthful and honest remembering of the past is a prerequisite to forgiveness, healing and salvation.

EASTERN EUROPEAN BAPTIST HISTORY WRITING AS AN EXERCISE OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Mark Noll has argued in his book *Turning Points* that one should be concerned about general church history for the following reasons: church history demonstrates the historical character of the Christian faith; it provides perspective on the interpretation of Scripture; and it is a laboratory for examining Christian interactions with surrounding culture.²² Noll adds the fourth element which he formulates in this way: "This realization, which historical study fairly shouts out loud, that God sustains the church despite the church's own frequent efforts

to betray its Saviour and its own high calling, points to another benefit in shaping the history of Christianity. Study of the past can be useful, that is, in shaping proper Christian attitudes.”²³ In the present article I would argue that on another level, in the field of Baptist historical study, a similar benefit can be pursued – that of a deeper and more meaningful spirituality.

Baptist practices, convictions and values are not floating aloof in the air – they are rooted in historical realities. Baptists emphasise a personal faith relationship with God. However, the sense of community is also part of their story, which must not be forgotten. Philip Sheldrake, a Roman Catholic researcher, has stated that in a culture characterized by fragmentation of collective consciousness there is a tendency “to inhibit a sense of community and to encourage a concentration on interiority and purely personal development.” He adds: “Spirituality easily becomes a private affair”²⁴ Awareness of the historical character of faith – including Baptist faith – helps to counterbalance the extreme individualism that haunts the life of the church. An individual person’s struggles regarding ethical conduct or a believer’s wrestling with the interpretation of some Biblical texts are not as unique as they seem to be. Somebody else on the previous “pages” of the church’s story has had similar questions.

Even if in Eastern European Baptist churches fellowship plays a considerable role and the faith community’s force moulding church members’ beliefs and practices may at times be stronger than in the West, engagement in mental dialogue with historical conversation partners is extremely important. Present generations of believers accept, reject or modify some aspects of this historical inheritance. Learning of and from their history, Eastern European Baptists develop a broader spirituality [237] that goes beyond their personal and local church frameworks. Baptists with strong convictions concerning personal interpretation of the Bible and the search for their life in the will of God need a wider basis for their faith, and sometimes require healthy historical corrections.²⁵

Historical collective memory as an agent of a movement’s spirituality is not something one should take for granted. For example, while Slavic Baptists today tend to be cautious about charismatic tendencies and their pneumatology is comparatively narrow, it is only a sign of some lost aspects of their theological spirituality. Johann Kargel, one of the most influential Slavic Baptist theologians in the twentieth century, was very much interested in the work of the Holy Spirit and made significant efforts to understand the pneumatological aspects of Christian life. Recently, Gregory Nichols has carried out a thorough research of Johann Kargel’s evangelical spirituality, and has explored Kargel’s links with the holiness movement.²⁶ This is historical material that enables Eastern Europeans to reinvent their rich

spirituality that may hide elements which, without careful historiography, will too easily be forgotten.

Historical research also shows the complexities of a religious movement's spirituality and sometimes contradictory views, and throws light on some Baptist paths that may have been leading to side tracks, or moving in circles, instead of helping to proceed forward. In the 1920s, in the young Communist country, the Russian evangelical leader Ivan Prokhanov planned to build a new city – “The City of the Sun” – a utopian, new Christian society. There were also other economic and social experiments, such as artisanal and building cooperatives, formed by evangelicals.²⁷ These experiments did not live long. At the same time Russian Baptists and Evangelical Christians, under severe state pressure, were forced to abandon their pacifism, which was characteristic of them.²⁸ There were also personal tensions between Evangelical Christian and Baptist leaders which did not help the evangelicals' cause and hindered the unity of believers.²⁹ Learning from these and other similar episodes will make an Eastern European theologian, church historian, pastor and church member more modest, as it is a reminder of our human limits and restrictions. Realizing that some decisions and historical episodes are more questionable when looked at from a distance, may serve as ferment for a balanced humility.

A rigorous and critical probing into their own historical experience would not only better inform Eastern European Baptists about the historical process they were and are involved with, it will also make it possible to present their spiritual heritage to others in a systematic and meaningful way. This “passing on” is, actually, a historiographical task, as David Bebbington has explained.³⁰ What can Eastern European Baptists – more specifically Slavic Baptists – offer to the global [238] Baptist arena and the wider Christian community? I would point out only a couple of things. Firstly, the spiritual dimension of suffering and interpretation of persecution. Secondly, Slavic mystical – rather than predominantly rational – understanding of faith.

In a situation where Western Christianity becomes more and more marginalised, where Christian lived-out-convictions become interpreted by the wider society as outdated or unimportant, Eastern European Baptist history may prove helpful as a discussion partner. One of the aspects of Eastern European Baptist life was their position of minority witness under atheistic surveillance and pressures, and the effects this had on believers' mutual relationships as well as on their ministry and calling. Analysis of the temptations and opportunities of a marginalised faith community can be enriched by an Eastern European Baptist experience. In addition, the whole area of suffering and its theological meaning has become neglected by

many Baptists – especially by those in the so-called first world countries. An Eastern European perspective could serve here as a challenge for further reflection,³¹ putting the topic into cultural and ecclesiological context. It may add an interpretative dimension to the conversation, instead of just rendering the factual data of cases and events.

Another lesson that Eastern European Baptist study of history can offer is what I would call a “mystical rather than rational approach” in spirituality. Rooted mainly in an Orthodox setting, Eastern European Baptists are less rational – perhaps one could say, “less Aristotelian” – in their logic, argumentation, apologetics and theology. In Baptist life in Eastern Europe, spirituality and theological thinking go more closely hand in hand when compared to Western Europe or North America. While Slavic Baptists, for example, have been influenced by Western thought, such as German, and more increasingly Anglo-American evangelical views, there are clearly links which tie them with a wider local and cultural, definitely Orthodox, setting. Even if Western theological thought has constantly been reminded “that spirituality is integral to the theological enterprise,”³² this conviction is lived out more naturally in an Orthodox context. This tradition, in turn, has at least some influence on Slavic Baptist ways, as has been argued by a young Russian Baptist historian and theologian Constantine Prokhorov.³³

Baptist historiography, emerging in Eastern European countries, is not only an element of academic research, but also a means of adding a deeper spirituality in the community of believers. Baptist historiography echoes back in other fields of theology: ecclesiology and worship, ethics and discipleship. The knowledge of plurality of views and personalities, the variety of answers to similar questions, observance of victories and defeats in the church has a potential to increase a sense of humility [239] and thankfulness, as well as an honest discussion on theological theory and practice. Eastern European Baptist historiography, when wrestling with local issues, such as suffering, Christian life under Communist oppression, links between spirituality and theology, has a rich heritage to share with global Christian family.

EASTERN EUROPEAN BAPTIST HISTORY WRITING AS A CONTRIBUTION TO WIDER HISTORIOGRAPHY

The fourth sub-section of this article claims that Eastern European Baptist historiography can serve as a helpful agent for expanding the range and themes in church history in general, and in Baptist history in particular. Eastern European Baptist historical study has valuable additions to make to wider historiography. History has often been written from the position of the

majority churches or from the position of “big” topics, often defined by traditional forms of Christianity, such as Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism or Protestantism. Even if in the Western world the historiography written from a confessional viewpoint and “granting the normative character of tradition for the contemporary expression of the church”³⁴ may be considered itself a “history,” some signs of this approach can still be found in the academic scene.

In Eastern Europe, the majority church’s standpoint tends to see Baptists and other evangelicals as sectarian movements, damaging the uniformity of the traditional church. Theological preferences as well as differences in understanding mission and worship play their role in forming this attitude. If the story of evangelicals is included in historical studies at all, it is often seen as a story of an anomaly or a narrative of a schismatic movement. Even in the Baltics, such as in Estonia or Latvia, where Lutheranism was historically a predominant form of Christianity, until recently research in church history followed the lines of mainline Protestantism (and, to a lesser extent, Orthodoxy).³⁵ This situation is changing slowly, with Eastern European Baptist scholars themselves beginning to take the lead in researching the past of their churches’ practices, spirituality and theology.³⁶

In Western Europe and in North America, it is only during the last half a century that church history has started to pay attention to topics neglected for long, such as the Christian story of women or ethnic minorities and their institutions.³⁷ Also, a growing interest in minority Christian groups, such as Anabaptists or Waldensians, should be noted. All this forms a favorable background in the Western world for Baptist studies, even in contexts where Baptists are a minority Christian denomination. The situation in Eastern Europe, especially in Slavic and Orthodox countries, is slightly different, despite the fact that, as [240] mentioned, recently significant Baptist research has emerged also in this part of the world.

As Eastern Europe was a part of the Communist world for many decades, the atheistic ideology eliminated “church history” – and “Baptist history” even more – from the list of academic research topics as independently valuable subject matter. Instead, historical data and processes related to churches were studied within the scope of the social sciences or within “scientific atheism,” areas, which were strictly controlled by party ideology. Church-related topics were made submissive to ideological-political goals. In this situation, one of the key sources on Russian Baptist life and history was the ideologically tinted book by Lev Mitrokhin, which even the author himself felt necessary to rework when political and religious freedom was increased in the 1990s.³⁸ The volume on Russian Evangelical Christians Baptists, published by the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and

Baptists in 1989, bears signs of government restrictions as well as of self-censure.³⁹ A need for a broader perspective was and still is evident.

Baptist scholars in Eastern Europe have an advantage that other historians are lacking. Baptist historians do not need to restrict their work only to state archives; they are often better aware of valuable materials that during Soviet times were kept at homes or hidden in church attics. Also, they are better equipped to use theological terminology that is meaningful for both wider academic audiences and church members. This double task, to contribute to the wider historiography and to serve baptistic communities giving meaning and interpreting their story, is a challenge for a Baptist historian. In Eastern Europe, with advice and guidance, a historian can also help local churches to preserve their archive materials and to systematize historical documents, as they form the primary source basis for further historical research.

The contribution to wider historiography would require attention to methodology, cooperation with other historians, as well as a broader approach to research topics. Eastern European Baptists should not narrow themselves within the limits of a marginal group, but instead explore how a minority group is linked with the wider culture. Baptist views on church and society, human rights, the role of volunteers in society, ecumenical relations, development of democracy are only some examples of research that might expand the horizon of Baptist historiography. Bradley and Muller believe that the present atmosphere in historical research, at least in the Western world, “is clearly conducive to a more thorough, less biased, approach to investigation in a wide range of fields.”⁴⁰ This would require more open and empathetic study of other traditions as well as collaborative efforts between researchers, even if they may come from different ecclesial backgrounds or may be [241] without any ecclesial background at all. “Large-scale cooperative scholarly projects now appear to be the only satisfactory way of producing general church histories.”⁴¹ There is a potential to enhance more balanced ecclesial histories, where evangelicals, including Eastern European Baptists, have much to add to the general picture. All this requires continuity in Baptist historical research.

Sharyl Corrado has stated, referring to the 1990s: “Ambiguity ensued as Baptists of the formerly Communist lands strove to claim their place in the community of Baptists worldwide, while maintaining a historical and cultural distinctiveness.”⁴² Similar ambiguity characterized and partly continues to characterize the role of Eastern European Baptist historiography. Who can alleviate this ambiguity? No doubt that Eastern European Baptists themselves have a key responsibility in overcoming this ambiguity by a valid academic historical study, which is able to contribute to the wider picture of church history. Nevertheless, historians from other parts of the world also have a responsibility to

intentionally keep on their “research radar” the rich and meaningful story of Eastern European Baptists.

CONCLUSION

The present article has on a broad scale argued that, firstly, Eastern European Baptist historiography is inevitably necessary for Baptists themselves. Awareness of their historical journey and the roles of key persons in it, the search for the meaning of their path of development is an element in the shaping of Baptist identity and spirituality. Painful church-state relations of Communist times can certainly be studied by “outsiders” – researchers who do not have experience of living under atheistic pressures – but the “insiders’ view” should by no means be neglected. Baptist scholars in Eastern Europe have access to personal archives and can find persons whose oral history would add considerably to the study. Besides this, Baptist history writing can serve as an agent, a supportive discipline, in the process of reconciliation with the painful past: reconciliation with the injustice inflicted on believers as well as reconciliation with individuals and churches’ compromises made under persecution. Also, relationships between officially registered and unregistered churches may need further exploration and interpretation. Baptist historical study in Eastern Europe can help us to remember truthfully — a process which potentially can lead to the experience of a redeemed past and better informed future.

Secondly, Eastern European Baptist historiography is a valuable addition to the wider ecclesial and academic family. Even Baptist histories striving to offer a global perspective often pay disproportionately little [242] attention to the Eastern European Baptist story. For a deeper knowledge of the worldwide Baptist past and present identity Eastern European Baptist research can offer enriching material. However, defining its task and challenge, Eastern European Baptist historiography should not limit itself to a narrow view of a minority evangelical movement – which Baptists are in this part of the world. Baptist research and reflection, emerging from historical study, can be a dialogue partner in the wider society and throw light on issues such as human rights, the role of volunteers, church-state relations, and others as well. Working together with other historians and theologians, both internationally and ecumenically, Eastern European Baptist historiography adds to comparative studies in the field of church history, challenges integrated studies bordering with sociology, political science and other disciplines, as well as helps to acquire a more holistic and comprehensive picture of Baptist history and identity worldwide.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Keith G. Jones and Ian M. Randall, eds., *Counter-Cultural Communities: Baptist Life in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008).
2. An excellent example is Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution 1905-1929* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005).
3. Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2006).
4. Daniel H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 10.
5. Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), p. 11.
6. Philip E. Thompson, "As it Was in the Beginning' (?): The Myth of Changelessness in Baptist Life and Belief," in Philip E. Thompson and Anthony R. Cross, *Recycling the Past or Researching History?* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), pp. 185-186.
7. Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II* (Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1981), p. 338.
8. See also Toivo Pilli, "Christians under Surveillance under Communism," *TransMission* (Summer, 2010), p. 16.
9. Oskar Olvik, *Mälestused. II osa* (Memoirs. Part II), handwritten manuscript, p. 372. Oleviste Church Archive, Tallinn.
10. Sharyl Corrado, "Introduction: In Search of an East European Baptist Identity," in Sharyl Corrado and Toivo Pilli, eds. *Eastern European Baptist History: New Perspectives* (Prague: IBTS, 2007), p. 7.
11. Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 56.
12. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1996), pp. 53-54.
13. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, pp. 14-16.
14. Trevor Beeson, *Discretion and Valour. Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Glasgow: Collins Fontana Books, 1974). [243]
15. See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), pp. 156-166; Tarmo Toom, "Facing Changing Times: What Can Estonian Baptists learn from the Early Church?," *Review and Expositor*, no. 4 (Fall 2004), pp. 701-703, 708-709.
16. Toivo Pilli, 'Christians as Citizens of a Persecuting State: A Theological and Ethical Reflection from a Historical Perspective,' *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, no. 1 (September, 2006), p. 22.
17. Andrea Strübind, *Die unfreie Freikirche. Der Bund der Baptistengemeinden in 'Dritten Reich'* (Wuppertal und Zurich: Brockhaus, 1995); Bernard Green, *European Baptists and the Third Reich* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2008).
18. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, pp. 234-238.
19. Volf, *The End of Memory*, p. 9.
20. See Michael Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia: Protestant Opposition to Soviet Religious Policy* (London and New York: Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, 1968), pp. 22, 26.
21. Volf, *The End of Memory*, p. 71.
22. Mark Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), pp. 14-18.
23. Noll, *Turning Points*, p. 18.
24. Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (London: SPCK, 1995), p. 3.
25. For a helpful study of Slavic Baptist hermeneutical practices, see Alexander Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the Soviet Union as a Hermeneutical Community," PhD dissertation, University of Wales and International Baptist Theological Seminary (Prague, 2010).
26. Gregory L. Nichols, "Ivan V. Kargel (1840-1937) and the Development of Russian Evangelical Spirituality," PhD dissertation, University of Wales and International Baptist Theological Seminary (Prague, 2009). About pneumatology, see pp. 163-164, 193-194.
27. Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists*, pp. 174-177.
28. Constantine Prokhorov, "The 'Golden Age' of the Soviet Baptists in the 1920s" in Sharyl Corrado and Toivo Pilli, eds. *Eastern European Baptist History: New Perspectives* (Prague: IBTS, 2007), pp. 95-97.
29. Prokhorov, "The 'Golden Age' of the Soviet Baptists," p. 99.
30. David Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2000), pp. 4-5.
31. By no means is Eastern European experience the only point of reference regarding this topic. For example, the discussion could be expanded to the Latin-American story of the church. See, for example, William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).
32. Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998), pp. 30-31.
33. Constantine Prokhorov, "Russian Baptists and Orthodoxy 1960-1990," PhD dissertation, University of Wales and International Baptist Theological Seminary (Prague, 2011).
34. James E. Bradley and Richard A. Muller, *Church History: An introduction to Research, Reference Works and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 11.
35. For Estonian church history, see for example, Olaf Sild and Velio Salo, *Lühike Eesti Kirikulugu* [A Short Estonian Church History] (Tartu, 1995). It is another topic if the Baltic countries today would identify themselves with Eastern Europe. Even if historically they have been part of the former Soviet bloc, they would culturally probably belong to Western Europe and to Scandinavia. This identification would also have political reasons which are out of the scope of the present article.
36. I have already mentioned research done and published by IBTS, Prague. There is a growing number of studies in Baptist history or Baptist historical theology also in Russian, with significant contributions in *Theological Reflections: Euro-Asian Theological Journal* that [244] publishes articles both in English and in Russian. There are studies in Russian by S. Savinskii, M. Karetnikova, S. Sannikov and others. In some cases, Baptist communities have told their story which otherwise would almost certainly go unnoticed in the society. An excellent example here is a very small Baptist community in Lithuania who have published a 302-page volume of their history in Lithuanian. Albertas Latuzis, *Po jo sparnais: Baptist istorija Lieluvoje 1841-1990* [Under His Wings: Baptist History in Lithuania 1841-1990] (Egle: Klaipeda, 2009).
37. Bradley and Muller, *Church History*, p. 24.
38. Lev Mitrokhin, *Baptizm* [Baptists] (Moscow: Politizdat, 1966); *Baptizm: istoija i Sovremennost* [Baptists: History and the Present] (St. Petersburg: Russkii Khristianskii Gumanitarny Institut, 1997).
39. *Istorija Evangeliskih Khristian-Baptislov v SSSR* [History of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the USSR] (Moscow: VSEHB, 1989).
40. Bradley and Muller, *Church History*, p. 25.
41. Ibid.
42. Corrado, "Introduction," p. 7.